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ABSTRACT

The Responsive College Programme is a centrally funded and organized activity encompassing a varied range of 10 local projects in England from whose experience it is hoped to obtain lessons for public sector education and training. The central/local nature of the enterprise imposes both the necessity of operating within broad, general constraints to facilitate cooperation, exchange, and comparison, and of shaping individual projects to reflect local needs. The general aim is to foster greater customization in the delivery of training packages by involving clients in constructing such packages and evaluating their delivery, and subsequently making necessary changes in college and local education agency provisions. This document contains an overview of the Responsive College Programme and the following four papers, of which the first three were presented at a conference in the summer of 1986: "Responsiveness: A Two-Way Process" (Geoffrey Holland--Director, Manpower Services Commission); "An Industrial View of Training Needs" (John Berkeley--Manager, Training Planning, Austin Rover Group); "Responsiveness: An Industrial View" (Simon Sperrin--Chief Executive, Manchester Chamber of Commerce and Industry); and "The Responsive College Programme: The Product Cycle" (Ernest Theodossin--Deputy Director, Responsive College Programme, and project coordinators from various regions). (KC)

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## The Responsive College Programme: A Progress Report

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Volume 19 Number 6

# THE RESPONSIVE COLLEGE: A PROGRESS REPORT

By Geoffrey Holland, John Berkeley, Simon Sperrin, Ernest Theodossin, John Bates, Robert Bilbrough, M. Chapman, N. Crowson, F. Donohue and David Smale

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# THE RESPONSIVE COLLEGE: A PROGRESS REPORT

## Contents

FOREWORD
David Parkes
Director, Responsive College Programme 313

INTRODUCTION 315

RESPONSIVENESS: A TWO-WAY PROCESS
Geoffrey Holland
Director, Manpower Services Commission 317

AN INDUSTRIAL VIEW OF TRAINING NEEDS
John Berkeley
Manager, Training Planning, Austin Rover Group 323

RESPONSIVENESS: AN INDUSTRIAL VIEW
Simon Sperrin
Chief Executive, Manchester Chamber of Commerce & Industry 333

THE RESPONSIVE COLLEGE PROGRAMME: THE PRODUCT CYCLE
Ernest Theodossin, Deputy Director, Responsive College Programme
and
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# FOREWORD

The first three papers in this report were given at a Responsive College Programme conference in the summer of 1986. Geoffrey Holland's paper places the programme in the context of the MSC's larger concern with the regeneration of quality and volume in training throughout the UK. From a major employer perspective John Berkeley examines sceptically the capacity of public sector FE to put its own house in order. Simon Sperrin welcomes the partnership between FE and the small business world. Ernest Theodossin, in collaboration with local project co-ordinators, illustrates aspects of the 'product cycle' from each of the first four projects.

The over-all programme is briefly described in the introduction to the text. The central metaphor of the programme is a Product Cycle — a systems approach which involves four components: market research; product development, selling and promotion; quality control; and after-sales service. It is not claimed that such an approach (within the marketing metaphor) is intellectually new or profoundly complex, merely that consequential systematic feedback into the decision-making processes of colleges and local authorities is something which has been more talked about than done.

As far as developmental activities are concerned, the Responsive College Programme has the following characteristics:

1 It has a central team which provides focus, support and consultancy; it has full time project coordinators in each of the programme's ten local authorities. As a consequence there is the tension of retaining the central focus of the project against the drive for local autonomy.

2 The programme is seen by central agencies as a means of deriving local evidence for the development of central policy

on funding, conditions of service and college/LEA organisation. To facilitate this process the central team has the task of deriving generalisable messages from different local conditions.

3 As a consequence of both 1 and 2 the programme sits in the middle of current FE preoccupations: the debate over control between central and local government, between local government and educational institutions; the thrust of financial-led incentives towards change, particularly from MSC; the ideology of the market-place.

4 The accord reached by the MSC/local authorities' policy group reviewing **Training for jobs** has meant that the contracts for the programme were pitched not at college but at local authority level. The Responsive College Programme is, essentially, a cross-authority/cross-colleges activity.

Given current turbulence in the system there is an increasing need for facilitators to act as buffers between the community and the organisation. Such people hold positions of influence in an unstable environment. They have to manage across boundaries and bring together protagonists from different sectors — often for temporary solutions and intermediate outcomes. These individuals are likely to hold the key to institutional survival and success in the foreseeable future. The Responsive College Programmes' local project coordinators are facilitators in this mould.

David Parkes
Director, Responsive College Programme

# INTRODUCTION TO THE RESPONSIVE COLLEGE PROGRAMME

The Responsive College Programme is a centrally funded and organised activity encompassing a varied range of ten local projects (Bedfordshire, Birmingham, Cleveland, Doncaster, Gwynedd, Lancashire, Lincolnshire, Newham, Sheffield, Strathclyde) from whose experience it is hoped to obtain lessons for public sector education and training. The central/local nature of the enterprise imposes both the necessity of operating within broad, general constraints to facilitate co-operation, exchange and comparison, and of shaping individual projects to reflect local needs.

The general aim is to foster greater customisation in the delivery of training packages by involving clients in constructing such packages and in evaluating their delivery, and subsequently making necessary changes in college and LEA provision.

The programme is centrally managed from FESC with local project co-ordinators and support staff appointed by each of the ten authorities involved.

**THE CENTRAL TEAM**

| | |
|---|---|
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# RESPONSIVENESS: A TWO-WAY PROCESS

Geoffrey Holland
Director, Manpower Services Commission

Our vocational education and training system is not the envy of the world and never has been.

Late in the day we have begun to wake up to the fact that, unless we create a thoroughly professional vocational education and training system which is at least the equal of that of our competitors both in quality and scale of effort, our long decline will continue.

There is a great deal to be done. The system we must build together is one with seven major characteristics.

First, opportunities and choices, at all levels, for people of all ages and in all communities, must be greater and of better quality than they have ever been in the past.

Next — the customer, whether that customer be employer or student or trainee, must determine provision. In particular it must be for the customer to decide when, where and how best he can learn.

Thirdly, access to vocational education and training must start in the schools, continue for every young person when that young person leaves school and then continue throughout working life — as the norm and the normal expectation.

Fourthly, competence and achievement must be encouraged, recognised and rewarded. And, in achieving that objective, we must remove

unnecessary barriers to progression or to access to education and training.

Fifthly, we must have a structure of recognised qualifications based on competence and performance — not simply on knowledge. This structure must be both comprehensive (for all sectors, all occupations at all levels) but also comprehensible. It must match up to the needs of modern society, modern industry and commerce.

Sixth, vocational education and training services must be of good quality and reliable and all who work in them must be highly professional and seen to be so.

And finally, and just as important as anything else, the system must provide value for money for everyone. It does not matter whether that money comes from the Exchequer, the employer or the individual. Every £ invested must yield a demonstrable return. And any hour spent in learning must be time well spent.

None of those objectives will be secured unless all providers of vocational education and training are responsive. And the most important resource we have for the provision of vocational education and training is the further education service. It has served this country well in the past. It must rise to the challenge of the future.

The Responsive College Programme has at its centre three key concepts.

The first is that of introducing a marketing product cycle approach to course provision: first, market research; next, product development; next, sales and promotion; next, quality control; and finally, after sales follow up.

The second key concept is that of highly professional management and delivery. We are seeking to identify and remove all those things which prevent responsiveness in current management resourcing and in current organisational arrangements.

And thirdly, the pursuit of excellence: to compete, survive and grow in the turbulent times in which we are and shall be living, every college (and indeed every education and training provider) needs to focus sharply on — and put to the forefront of attention — four key factors:

— **innovation**: day in day out we must look for better ways of

doing things, new products, new services, new processes, new offerings;

- **quality**: the customer expects quality and will not come again if it is missing;

- **closeness to the customer**: whether the customer be employer or individual, he must dictate provision and not the reverse;

- **value for money**: because if the colleges do not provide value for money, someone else will.

## WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT THE CUSTOMERS?

Take management first. Let us not mince words. British management, by international standards, is under-educated, under-trained, under-qualified and unprofessional. And for all those reasons, Britain has suffered from a management which has had the shortest time horizons for its concerns: this afternoon's problem, next week's delivery date, this year's bottom line.

Because its time horizons have been so short, British management has neglected investment, particularly investment in research and development and in people. Of course British management will say it values its workforce. It certainly says it is concerned about and does a good deal of education and training of that workforce. But the fact of the matter is that most British managers do not know what education and training they are doing. And very few have anything other than the vaguest of ideas how that investment compares with the investment their competitors overseas are making. If they did know that, most would have a shock.

So British management is not falling over itself to invest in education and training. It is no pushover in these matters. And it is not exactly falling over itself to encourage its workforce to engage in personal development, in updating skills or in extending those skills. And that workforce itself (the individual students and trainees of the future) has no particularly favourable experience of education. Six out of 10 of those at work today left full time education at the earliest possible leaving age. They did so because education had failed them — quite literally. Their experience of education is a process of examinations and tests designed to fail, to eliminate, to remove and to ensure that people drop out at a certain rate, leaving a certain number at each stage.

So the majority of the adult population got little from their education. The majority associate educational institutions and services (and the colleges are no exception) with failure rather than achievement. They have very little interest in education as they have experienced it. They have even poorer expectations of what it can offer. Indeed, for many people, education is for someone else — the 'bosses', the 'posh people', the 'people who speak differently'. And if education or training is offered to your average man or woman at work the first reaction is one of deep suspicion: what have I done wrong? An I going to be made redundant?

These are the realities and they are the nuts that education and training providers must crack. Those nuts will never be cracked without the approaches the Responsive College Programme is seeking to develop and foster.

Four projects have already started — in Bedfordshire, Birmingham, Lincolnshire and Sheffield. Six further projects are starting this year and half the LEAs of England and Wales have bid for inclusion.

The programme is one big demonstration project and a lot of local demonstration projects — because, at the end of the road, we have to get the act together locally. We are competing in a world market-place in which no man, no firm and no country is an island, but most of us are born, educated, live, work and die in the same locality. That is where the vocational education and training system must be developed and must be brought together in a way that responds both to local needs and national needs, short, medium and longer term.

It is a great challenge for the education service. But it is also, I venture to suggest, a challenge to employers too. If the further education service is seeking to respond (as indeed it is) how about a response from employers? For too long employers have been criticising the education service, often in general terms which are unhelpful. Sometimes, through their criticisms, employers are trying to shrug off their responsibilities onto others. Sometimes their criticisms are based on ignorance of the facts. Sometimes, they are in general terms which mean little in reality. And sometimes those criticisms are justified.

Whatever the criticisms, now is the time for involvement by employers. The opportunities for employers to involve themselves directly in the design, management and delivery of education provision have never been

greater. Within the MSC's scope and range of programmes alone, consider the following:

— Every TVEI pilot project must secure effective employer involvement in management and delivery of provision in secondary schools.

— Every development plan submitted by an LEA for funding of its non-advanced further education must demonstrate that employers have been involved in the preparation of that plan.

— The two-year YTS offers employers opportunities as never before to discuss provision by the further education service and to integrate that provision in the design of a total programme which is the employer's responsibility.

— Under the adult training strategy, local collaborative projects up and down the country offer employers the chance to articulate their needs and to take a share in developing an effective resource locally to meet those needs.

Yet I have to say that, for all these opportunities, employers are not yet playing the part they should. There are major challenges to employers here — not just to the education service.

What we lack, compared with our overseas competitors, is an effective cross-sector local employers' organisation, representing all sectors, firms large and small, national and local, capable of playing its full part in the development of the vocational education and training system.

What a great thing it would be if in Industry Year employers began to move in this direction. Some have — and have found it immensely rewarding. Some local organisations (including some Chambers of Commerce) have shown what can be done but where are the majority of employers? Are they going to fail the education service just as they claim the education service has failed them?

Responsiveness works two ways. And we need both ways. We in the MSC will do everything we can to promote that two-way responsiveness, locally and nationally. The Responsive College Programme is a start — but only a start.

# AN INDUSTRIAL VIEW OF TRAINING NEEDS

John Berkeley
Manager, Training Planning
Austin Rover Group

By definition, the idea of being able to present an overview of the training needs of British industry is a misnomer. There is no general consensus and, in any event, pronouncements as to 'what industry thinks' are potentially dangerous and misleading. What follows must therefore, of necessity, be a personal view, conditioned by particular experiences and subject to the influence of individual preoccupations.

At a recent meeting with the vice principal of a college of higher education, he made the surprising announcement that he had not 'had a single day's training' for his job.

One was first struck by his matter of fact approach. While he was certainly not being boastful, neither was there any hint of confession. The remark wasn't prefaced by 'I have to admit that . . .' or by 'you probably won't believe this, but . . .'. Quite the contrary, in fact and, almost as surprising to me as the admission itself, volunteered in the presence of another member of his own college staff.

On reflection, however, the encounter raised much more fundamental issues. What was the hidden message in his admission? Was he indirectly seeking to comment on the quality of personal development he had received at the hands of his principal and contrast this with his more enlightened approach towards his own staff? Had needs been identified but not met for some reason? Was this a thinly disguised criticism of in-service resources?

Alternatively, was he directing the remark against himself and

acknowledging that he had not fulfilled his own responsibility for maintaining and improving his performance, for up-dating and developing his skills and knowledge to meet the demands of his extremely important role in a changing world? Or was he merely seeking to convey that he had no needs and was somehow created a ready-made vice principal fully equipped from birth, or at least since first qualifying as a teacher?

One will never know. However, the remark surely provokes suspicion as to the general level of concern for development and training in that particular institution. What is especially ironic is that it is in just such an institution that one might expect to be able to take that concern for granted.

Lower down the hierarchy, things seem little better. Take, for example, the case of a recent secondment to industry from the Business Studies Department of an FE college. It was the secondee who arranged the six-month attachment, without the active participation of anyone at the college. At no time during the secondment was there any contact between the college and the company, nor with the LEA adviser responsible for FE in-service training, assuming of course that such an individual existed. Establishing objectives and monitoring their achievement was therefore left to the secondee and the company, as was the development of plans for follow-up collaborative work in the post-secondment period.

Recent enquiries as to the possibility of obtaining a copy of a local college's Staff Development Policy were met by the polite suggestion that it might be better to contact the LEA, although no one could quite identify who within the authority actually had responsibility for FE staff development.

On another occasion, at a meeting of colleges offering professional updating courses for FE lecturers under the DES/PICKUP arrangements, it was all too apparent that, while it might reasonably be expected that the needs of colleagues would be the most easily understood and satisfied simply because of familiarity with the client population, the benefit of existing communications networks and so on, this was certainly not the case. Colleges reported difficulties in getting course information beyond the principal's desk, details of courses never reaching those for whom the training was intended, a mismatch of course arrangements with the requirements of would-be participants, problems of cancellations and non-payment, no proper systematic management of in-service training, etc. etc. There was little evidence among the providers of any serious attempt at monitoring and evaluation, as far as one could see, and follow-up action plans were conspicuous by their absence — to say the very least.

## CREDIBILITY?

This does not auger well as an institutional climate conducive to responsiveness. If the FE sector cannot demonstrate the capacity to meet its own needs, what credibility does it deserve as a provider for others?

An institution that has no systematic staff development programme of its own has no right to be taken seriously as an effective provider and this 'industrial view of training needs' must therefore focus first on the needs that exist within the college.

The teaching work force in the colleges is the major resource of the FE sector's disposal. That work force has particular characteristics. Less than half have a professional teaching qualification, a significant proportion are employed on a part time basis and an increasing number on fixed-term or temporary contracts. These staff are probably least likely to benefit from access to development opportunities, although their contribution is vital.

Responsiveness demands a purposeful and change orientated culture within the institution, an environment in which people know where they are going and can progress with confidence. However, as David Parkes observed in 1982 in **The changing face of FE**, 'Occasionally it is possible to discover a college and its department where objectives are written down, occasionally attempts are made to evaluate outcomes, especially at course level. Rarely, however, are staff systematically appraised, institutions or their principals evaluated'.

This is not a dynamic and growth orientated environment and yet that is precisely what is essential if effective staff development strategies are to be introduced. Whether it is called appraisal or not, there is nevertheless a need for a systematic approach by which teaching and support staff share in a process designed to identify needs and mutually agree what actions will be taken to satisfy those needs and by whom.

The reference to support staff is intentional, since it is no use convincing lecturers that a responsive, client-centred philosophy has been adopted by the college unless someone takes the trouble to communicate successfully that message to the telephonists, receptionists and everyone else who may come into direct contact with the customer.

However, there is an important prerequisite if this new age of

enlightenment is to dawn in our colleges and a positive approach taken to staff development. There must be relative stability; people must know what is expected of them and what they are required to do. There must be trust and mutual respect both upwards and downwards within the hierarchy. People must feel sufficiently secure to be able to reveal their concerns and shortcomings and recognise that needs for updating and improvement exist. There must be a large measure of continuity so that medium and long-term plans can be drawn up with confidence, and so on.

Without such a climate, the fertile ground which staff development needs in order to take root and grow will be missing. An environment that is unstable, where there is a lack of clarity regarding individual and collective objectives, where trust and mutual respect are not immediately apparent, where there is insecurity and anxiety about the future, where staff feel vulnerable and defensive in the face of change and where discontinuity and short-term fire fighting are the order of the day will be the kiss of death for the most well intentioned staff development plan.

Whether a supportive or an alien climate exists within FE colleges is a critical issue which can not be ignored.

## INDUSTRIAL SECONDMENTS

However, it is also very much in the interests of industry that the training needs that undoubtedly exist within colleges are satisfied and the potential for exploiting that shared interest through joint collaboration is considerable. We need a properly planned, well organised, suitably validated and adequately funded programme of industrial secondments for the FE sector. What better way for staff to update their knowledge, get hands-on experience of best practice, re-establish the credibility of the college lecturer in the eyes of industrial specialists and, at the same time, become uniquely well placed to identify product development opportunities to be exploited as soon as they return to college, armed with a new range of client contacts.

As things stand, secondments can be anything but well planned and often lack any effective means by which the curriculum, teaching methods or, equally important, colleagues who were not able to be released or were seconded elsewhere, can benefit. Since mutual advantage can so clearly be demonstrated, it is likely that industry would welcome a properly organised

and supported secondment programme with open arms and be only too willing to co-operate. Care must be taken to ensure that large companies do not dominate such programmes since the experience of secondees will inevitably be unrepresentative of industry as a whole and the pay back, in the form of improved responsiveness, distorted as a result. The creation of consortia of smaller companies, perhaps under the auspices of Chambers of Commerce, could provide an alternative source of secondments and access to organisations which will often lack the resources and facilities to satisfy many of their own needs. The outcome of such an initiative could be particularly beneficial for all concerned.

One danger, already familiar to those in the secondary sector, is that secondees tend to fall into two distinct groups, the enthusiasts and the escapees, and FE colleges can ill-afford to lose good staff who discover that the grass is greener on the other side of the fence. Once again, it is vital that the prevailing climate at the college is conducive not only to staff feeling that they can be away for a while without cause for concern but also to management feeling confident enough to let them go.

## QUALITY OF PROVISION

As well as a college's capacity to satisfy its own needs, there are other issues which will influence industrial perceptions of the FE sector and its credibility as a training provider. Not least of these is the nature and quality of that provision.

Just as staff performance appraisals invariably convey a great deal more about the appraiser than the appraise, so the existence of effective validation procedures is the only really reliable evidence that the process of effectively satisfying training needs and achieving learning objectives is taken seriously by a provider.

The importance an organisation attaches to the quality of its products is one of the best indicators of how genuinely responsive it is to the needs of its customers/clients as opposed to merely playing lip service to delivering the goods.

The Responsive College Programme is aimed at making FE more client centred, but who is the client? Is it the student who, unlike his or her counterpart during the compulsory years, is there by choice, has

expectations and entitlements and ultimately can exercise the right to vote with his or her feet? Or is it the employer from industry or commerce, who may be paying the bill?

Equally important, what is the product? As David Parkes (1982) pointed out, 'The great distinction between FE and other educational sectors is that at the core of an FE college exists the course rather than the subject. The course is the student's point of reference'.

But while the course is the natural focus for a product-centred approach, is it inevitably so in the marketing orientated era into which this programme is seeking to propel, or drag, the FE colleges?

These questions are important when one considers the issue of quality. Just as industry has moved from the time-served basis of the traditional apprenticeship system towards the building block approach to achieving defined and measurable competence objectives that is at the very heart of the two-year Youth Training Scheme, so a radically different view of assessing quality and establishing outcomes may be required when offerings are more individually tailored to satisfy needs.

## LEARNING WITHIN WORK

Britain's poor performance in the field of education and training when compared with our major overseas competitors has received a great deal of attention in recent years. Although there are many reasons for this, it is generally assumed that where senior management tend not to support training activities, it is because they cannot see any direct commercial value. This seems particularly true of their attitude towards generalised or off-the-shelf packaged courses. They find it difficult to link these with any specific work goals and thus they are seen as little more than acts of faith.

In order for there to be any prospect of improvement in this situation, senior management must manage the learning process as opposed to the learning content, actively pursuing the type of continuous development programme advocated by the Institute of Personnel Management (1985).

Time spent learning within work is more important than money spent separating learning from work. However, any large scale movement towards a more effective integration of learning within the working

environment itself has considerable implications for the FE sector as existing and potential providers. If FE and HE were to start addressing the need for organisations to learn for themselves instead of promoting external offerings, there would be real evidence of responsiveness, of academics rethinking traditional values.

The major obstacle to the development of further education and training in Britain is the attitude within the adult population towards the idea of education itself and, by extension, the whole concept of learning in general. We have a compulsory education system that, for a great many young people, fails to develop confidence in themselves and their abilities and emphasises that which they cannot do rather than that which, with appropriate teaching and learning strategies, they can.

The result is that too many adults, equating learning with school, lack confidence in their own ability to learn by themselves, are unwilling to take the initiative in extending their knowledge and skills and, not surprisingly perhaps, do not react positively to opportunities for such development when these are available.

Recognising such problems, many organisations are seeking to create circumstances in which the individual is encouraged to learn in a setting which is non-threatening and by means which allow the learner to progress at his or her own pace.

However, if for example it is for assistance with the process rather than the content of learning that industry and commerce turn to the FE colleges, as seems highly desirable, what will be the response? What is the product and who is the client? At the present pace of change, is the real potential of the FE sector in the market-place that of change agents and process consultants rather than as purveyors of neat course packages?

## TRAINING NEEDS

Although it is impossible to generalise on the training needs of industry, it is possible to provide some pointers, some areas of intervention in the identification of training needs process. There is no single approach that can successfully be adopted in every situation. Instead there is a matrix which recognises a range of types of need and a variety of factors affecting possible FE intervention.

Figure 1 identifies four principal levels in the identification of training needs process.

- **Organisation analysis** is concerned with identifying those needs that arise, directly or indirectly, from over-all company strategies and business plans, unrelated to the competence or performance of individual members of the organisation.

- **Task analysis** is concerned with identifying those needs that arise from the specific tasks and responsibilities to be fulfilled within a particular job, once again unrelated to the characteristics of any particular incumbent.

- **Person analysis** is concerned with identifying those needs which arise from an assessment of an individual's performance in his or her current job.

- **Planning for change** is concerned with identifying those needs that can be anticipated as arising from technological, organisational and other changes affecting people and their jobs.

In considering how FE colleges can effectively intervene in this process as potential providers, it must be recognised that the nature of that intervention will be affected by a number of factors, four of which are identified in Figure 1. Each approach to the identification of training needs is subject to different timescales, both for planning the response and implementing its delivery. Appropriate levels of contact within the organisation will differ, as will the frequency of contact necessary with those contacts. Finally, the level of detail possible when specifying desired end results will also vary.

Although the matrix itself should be fairly generally applicable, the specific examples shown in Figure 1 are merely representative and will differ considerably from company to company according to size, technological complexity, product life cycle, etc.

FE colleges face a range of choices in planning their interventions. Should they, for example, concentrate their efforts on one or more of the identification of training needs processes, developing the capacity to respond to particular needs and establishing a reputation for doing so? Alternatively, should they seek to emphasise the contribution they can

*Figure 1* **The identification of training needs — opportunities for intervention**

| ITN PROCESS | TIMESCALE | LEVEL OF CONTACT | FREQUENCY | LEVEL OF DETAIL |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Organisation Analysis | Long-term planning<br>Long-term delivery | Company senior management<br>Employer organisations | Annually | General strategy |
| Task Analysis | Medium-term planning<br>Medium-term delivery | Company level personnel/training<br>Management | Annually (once established) | Skill and knowledge requirements |
| Person Analysis | Short-term planning<br>Short/medium-term delivery | Establishment level training<br>Staff | Annually with regular reviews | Specific competence objectives |
| Planning for Change | Medium/long-term planning<br>Short/medium term delivery | Company/establishment level training<br>Staff | At least twice a year | Learning aims |

make to the process of learning, collaborating in joint development projects to produce open learning materials?

Quite clearly, there is no one answer. Opportunities for intervention will differ greatly from one area to another, affected by the size and nature of local industry and commerce and its general economic state of health.

Identifying training needs is not easy. But, if a convincing case can be made for FE as credible collaborators in the training planning process itself, as flexible partners in devising and delivering cost-effective learning, properly integrated with the company's operations and tailored to the needs of those concerned, then industry will welcome that intervention. The FE sector ought to be uniquely well placed to fulfil that role. Whether it is equipped to take full advantage of that opportunity is entirely in its own hands, with the possible exception that, as with everything worthwhile, there are resource implications. But that's another story.

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# RESPONSIVENESS: AN INDUSTRIAL VIEW

Simon Sperrin
Chief Executive, Manchester Chamber of Commerce and Industry

We should not allow the search for greater responsiveness to tempt us into exaggerated criticism of FE. Many colleges are commendably responsive; most are becoming more so. FE colleges were established mainly as a response to local training needs, in a way that universities were not. Even so, the changes which the Responsive College Programme is implementing are fundamental and the difficulties and anxieties which the workforce in FE are experiencing should not be underestimated. Therefore, the first message which we in the business community should give to FE is our wholehearted support. You are tackling the right problems and the changes we see in FE are all going in the right direction.

The context within which reform of FE is taking place is little short of a revolution in secondary schooling (GCSE, TVEI, CPVE, the alternative curriculum strategy), complete transformation of the interface between school and work (YTS), a review of vocational qualifications (RVQ) and another review of the funding of vocational education and training (VET). The business community is bewildered by all this change. We understand that an omelette cannot be made without breaking eggs, but we are concerned that these initiatives should not be made in isolation. Each phase of a person's education and training should build on the previous phase and provide a good foundation for the next.

The responsive college should respond not just to local skill shortages but also to the changing pattern of schooling and VET. We would therefore urge colleges:

- to seek partnership with local schools in curriculum planning;
- to ensure that their entry requirements encourage the trend towards balance and breadth in the school curriculum;
- to participate in the development of pupil profiling;
- to support the struggle against the academic stronghold of examination boards;
- to seek liaison with professional institutes and providers of continuing education so that FE students acquire the skills and aptitudes they will need for future qualifications, in-company training or skills up-dating.

**FUNDING**

MSC has shown how change can be accelerated by judicious use of small amounts of public money (for example, the Responsive College Programme, or local collaborative projects (LCPs) in adult training). The same philosophy lies behind the Department of Education and Science's PICKUP project. There is a danger that colleges and local education authorities (LEAs) not participating in this programme will claim that change is not possible in times of reduced funding. We in business would not subscribe to that view. The last seven years of economic recession have brought more changes, not just in technology but in the very structure of industry, than 20 years of prosperity. Training which is closely related to the customers' requirements need be no more expensive than irrelevant provision. The shorter the funding, the more important it is to ensure that every penny is effectively spent.

Having said this, we are believers in market forces — and that means the carrot as well as the stick. The stick is provided by the conditional withholding by MSC of 25 per cent of funding for non-advanced further education (NAFE), but there should be positive rewards for the responsive college too. If the funding mechanism is discouraging to the responsive college, may I suggest you consider getting us to fire your shots for you. In particular, any LEA which does not allow colleges to retain profits on short courses or tailor-made programmes for local businesses needs a kick in the pants.

## MARKETING

Many colleges are changing their staff structure so as to assign specific responsibility for collecting data on the market and for providing a single contact point for the customer. However, responding to local needs is not just a matter of appointing a 'vice principal (marketing)'. It involves all course designers, and preferably all teachers, keeping in regular touch with local business — and not just at the time of submitting new course proposals or seeking re-validation. It involves not only designing relevant curricula but understanding the relevance of course content and adapting it continuously to the changing business environment which students are about to enter. So use the full potential of:

- advisory committees;
- secondment of lecturers to business;
- consultancy or project work for local firms;
- recruitment of staff from business;
- work placements for students;
- curriculum development groups;
- experience of past students;
- case studies from working situations.

## THE PRODUCT

Matching college provision with local skill requirements involves internal as well as external problems. College provision has to be flexible:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| in location | — | in college, in the workplace or at home; |
| in time | — | out of hours, in academic holidays, at week-ends; |
| in mode | — | intensive or spread out, matched to the student's other commitments and learning ability; |

in content — so that courses to a common standard can nevertheless be tailored to the needs of companies or individuals.

This suggests a modular approach rather than the traditional subject approach. Trainees pick and mix from modules, moving at their own speed through a cumulative programme of experiences, acquiring credits on the way towards their certificate or qualification. Such a delivery mechanism is more responsive not only because it is flexible but also because it reflects real training needs which often do not fit into specialised subject areas. For example, the need for information technology skills arises not because we want a lot of IT specialists but because we want managers, accountants, designers, production planners, materials planners and administrative staff to understand the applications of IT to their work. In the same way commercial awareness should not be the preserve of business studies but should be a core element in all vocational courses.

## THE CUSTOMER

The main external problem is that of identifying the customer's needs. Businesses are not good at foreseeing future skill requirements or converting a skills shortage into an articulated training need. The tradition of time-serving and the use of qualifications to regulate the supply of labour have encouraged generations of employers and employees to think of training as something which is done once and for all at the beginning of a career. It has become an entry ticket and is not considered in terms of either manpower planning or personal development. To make matters worse many business people would not, rightly or wrongly, expect colleges to be able to meet their needs. The needs of the small firm are particularly difficult to pin-point, partly because of the extent to which proprietors of small business think that small firms are different and partly because of the extent to which they are different. (The two are not necessarily identical, but they are both realities to be faced.) One of the real differences is, to use the words of Victor Kiam, that the entrepreneur needs to avoid a structured environment. His speciality is reacting to opportunities in new ways, fast.

## LOCAL COLLABORATION

The right solution to this would seem to me to be a joint effort at local level

between LEA, Manpower Services Commission (MSC) and the business community, normally the Chambers of Commerce. I would commend to you the models which are already being developed along these lines, often with LCP funding, such as the Northamptonshire Training Information Service. NTIS is a local market-place, employer based (at the Chamber) but heavily supported by the LEA, where the customer can make contact with all local training provision, whether public or private. This kind of partnership creates a natural base on which to develop a training advisory service, training awareness campaigns or the collection of local labour market information.

## FORMAL AND INFORMAL TRAINING

If we succeed in all this, when colleges are all responsive and local collaboration has produced the right market-place, we shall come close to achieving another very exciting outcome. Geoffrey Holland's criticism of industry for doing so little training is no doubt necessary and true, but there is a temptation to fall into the trap of taking no account of the informal training which goes on day by day in every business whenever personnel, responsibilities, products or technologies change. Most in-company training, though likely to be highly cost effective and relevant, is reckoned by outsiders to be second-class or just not counted. Once we have a market-place in which company training can be offered for sale and college facilities are available for use, collectively or singly, to the customer's specification, we open the door to new combinations. Modules of college courses could take the form of real problem-solving in the workplace; induction of new employees or on-the-job up-dating of skills could, if properly structured and accredited, become steps towards a recognised certificate. In-company training could be improved in quality if professionals from FE helped design the courses and monitor the quality. College training would benefit from the use of real life working situations as the vehicle for imparting skills and understanding. Companies would then perceive more easily the relevance of formal training to their needs while individual trainees could acquire credits towards a qualification as they learn their jobs.

# THE RESPONSIVE COLLEGE PROGRAMME: THE PRODUCT CYCLE

Ernest Theodossin, Deputy Director, The Responsive College Programme, and
Project Co-ordinators: John Bates (Lincolnshire), Robert Bilbrough (Birmingham), M Chapman (Sheffield), N Crowson (Sheffield), F Donohue (Bedfordshire), David Smale (Lincolnshire)

The Responsive College Programme (RCP) is a £1.6M national initiative funded by the Manpower Services Commission, run by the Further Education Staff College, and intended to develop more effective means of enabling colleges to respond to the training needs of employees and employers.

The programme's origins lie in two 1984 publications, the White Paper, **Training for jobs**, and **Competence and competition** (NEDC/MSC). both of which alleged that FE was failing to respond to employer needs. A later publication, **A challenge to complacency** (Cooper & Lybrand Associates 1985) emphasised the alternative perspective, that industry was failing to invest sufficiently in training. Together all of these documents, trailed by heated discussion in the education press, have engendered a polemic in the midst of which the RCP is attempting to promote co-operation where it does not already exist. Consequently, the RCP is not a research project in pursuit of detached understanding, but an action programme dedicated to learning from best practice and to effecting real change where something less than the best emerges.

The action model is a Product Cycle developed in the course of an initial enquiry funded by the MSC in 1985 and explored in some detail in **In search of the responsive college** (Theodossin 1986). The model postulates four activities (Figure 1) which training providers need ideally to undertake and/or draw upon:

340 *Figure 1* Product cycle spiral

1 **Market research** — the identification of existing/potential client groups and of what they need/want;

2 **Product development, selling and promoting** — the creation of appropriate courses and programmes (based on the needs/wants revealed in 1 above), and the proclamation of their availability to interested individuals and groups;

3 **Quality control** — the monitoring of the resultant courses and programmes both during and after their delivery;

4 **After-sales service** — exploring the resultant consequences in terms of job take-up, skills acquisitions, usefulness to employees and employers, i.e. how it all worked out in the 'real world'.

A number of caveats need to be emphasised. The Product Cycle is very much client centred on students and employers, and it tends to view 'needs' in terms of client satisfaction. The end is enhanced customisation, the involvement of college customers in the provision and delivery of their training needs, and thus a shift from the traditional provider-centred approach where teacher knows best in all instances. The intention is to promote a partnership between providers and clients. Of course one needs to recognise that the RCP is centred on work-related training activities, that not all such training leads to employment, and that colleges serve clients other than those in or seeking work. On the other hand, the Product Cycle is arguably applicable to all client groups, since what it advocates is the sharing of the teaching/learning experience and the need to match, in FE patois, courses to horses, rather than the reverse.

The Product Cycle is clearly a marketing approach. The range of activity it encompasses has tended to be novel in terms of 'range' rather than 'activity', and the first four projects have uncovered examples of most kinds of Product Cycle activity. However, that identification has revealed work which has tended to be ad hoc, irregular, occasional, informal and frequently not visible to many. Such activity has also tended to be fragmentary and unlinked to other initiatives in the college or authority. Conversely, the Product Cycle seeks to be **holistic**, to link part to part, and part to whole. It suggests that activity should be **formal** i.e. systematic, regular and organised. When the Product Cycle is fully operational, all of its activities are likely to be carried on concurrently. Thus far there are four

active RCP projects, all started in 1986: Bedfordshire and Sheffield in January, Lincolnshire in February, Birmingham in July. Each project is expected to last two years, and the first four will be joined by another six two-year projects by January 1987: Cleveland, Doncaster, Gwynedd, Lancashire, Newham and Strathclyde.

While they may not be explicitly stated, the underlying implications of the Product Cycle are perhaps more innovatory than any single aspect of its activity: marketing costs money; money is a resource; resources are scarce; scarce resources imply sharing; sharing necessitates co-operation — between courses, between departments, between colleges, between the college and the LEA. Cooperative endeavour has not been traditionally omnipresent in a system noted for its competitive and entrepreneurial spirit. Conversely, in the popular imagination, a lack of co-operation may well be associated with marketing which tends to be viewed as about selling and promoting (glossy prospectuses, clever logo, presentation, image and hype). The RCP's starting point is the PICKUP definition of marketing as 'the creative process of satisfying customer needs profitably (effectively)' and the recognition that 'A marketing orientated organisation is committed to a continuing process of identifying, reviewing and analysing customer and potential customer needs'.

In very broad terms the RCP functions in two phases of activity. In the first a management information system (the Product Cycle) is installed, either throughout a college in a single small institution (Lincolnshire), or in sectors (e.g. engineering, catering, business studies, etc.) in the larger multi-college projects (Bedfordshire, Birmingham, Sheffield). The resultant information has not proved to be universally negative. In virtually all institutions there have surfaced indications of high levels of client satisfaction in a wide range of courses, all of which is both a cause for celebration and a pretext for teacher and group recognition. However, where difficulties do surface, the intention is to offer assistance and this has frequently come in the form of a second phase of activity: negotiated change, staff development activity, the search for additional resources. The intention is not merely to identify problems, but to assist with their resolution. At this stage we tend to view the first activity phase (the management information system) as generalisable across the system, albeit with modifications to take account of regional variations; but the second activity phase (the change process) as highly individualistic, reflecting local Politics/politics and a wide range of contextual variables.

Perhaps the most effective way of demonstrating how the RCP functions at ground level is to draw upon the experiences of our first four projects. What follows is, of course, selective and does not represent the totality of experience in any one project since all projects have pursued activity in all phases of the Product Cycle. What follows is also 'a snapshot' taken by mid-summer, 1986, since which point other developments have occurred. It will thus be useful to organise these collective experiences along the phases of the Product Cycle, pausing only to make some general observations about the phase and to delineate briefly each project in demographic terms, before turning over to one or both of the two project co-ordinators employed in each LEA.

## MARKET RESEARCH

*For those who see market research as the central focus of marketing activity, it may come as something of a surprise to learn that only limited research has thus far been done within two of the larger RCP projects. The size of their catchment areas effectively precludes the projects (and their individual colleges) from undertaking market research. One possible way round the difficulty is described by a Bedfordshire co-ordinator whose project is in a 'mixed' county with conurbations and dispersed rural populations.*

In order to get the right information to an employer at the right time, a training provider must have knowledge of the needs of that employer or the organisation. Since Bedfordshire colleges don't normally have this information, it was not surprising that many employers interviewed suggested that they have difficulty in getting access to appropriate information and in locating training to meet particular needs. Most employers received a college prospectus but in the case of small employers, in particular, this publication is regarded as far too general to be of assistance.

Discussions with colleagues from other local projects confirm that an inconsistent information flow from employers to colleges and vice versa prevents colleges from making an effective response to local industry. If precise information were available, more effective curriculum planning and targeting of publicity would undoubtedly occur.

The collection of such information would be a costly and complex process

which colleges, even with employer support, would find impossible to finance by themselves. Studies such as that carried out by the Brooklands School of Management underline the difficulties colleges face in trying to respond to small business needs through isolated visiting and increased personal contact. The co-ordinators, therefore, have investigated possible areas for collaboration between employers, colleges and other agencies engaged in dialogue with local employers. Discussions with the LEA, MSC, careers service, chamber of commerce and PICKUP have established that they are all involved in providing information to and receiving information from employers. All of these agencies, in common with the colleges, are in the early stages of constructing databases containing information about employers and their needs. The co-ordinators have, in consequence, convened a working group comprising a representative from each agency to improve collaboration. A forum has thus been provided for all groups to articulate their needs and to reach agreement on a way forward which will maximise resources and avoid duplication of effort.

Early consultation with employers suggests that a database which contains information about training provision (private or public), college staff expertise, information about training grants, and information about employer organisations will increase responsiveness to labour market needs and encourage the supply of appropriate skills. Colleges will continue to improve personal contact where possible, but a well marketed information service readily accessible to employers, whatever the size of their organisation, should stimulate demand for training.

The cost of developing an employer information service on such a scale will, as suggested earlier, be considerable. The local authority has therefore asked the MSC NAFE central reserve for financial support. The local authority is ideally placed to make effective use of additional funding. It could use such funding to invest considerable resources and manpower in the scheme because of its own 1000 place YTS agency which carries out more than 4000 visits to employers' premises each year. The agency could, with limited expansion of its existing role, play a significant part in collecting relevant data from employers. If financial support is received, a data-base link will be established between the LEA and chamber of commerce.

F Donohue
Bedfordshire Project Co-ordinator

*A similar situation exists in Sheffield, although co-ordinating work is not quite so well advanced. Conversely, in Lincolnshire — a project centred on a single Group V college in Boston — the isolation of the institution from other centres of population in a highly dispersed authority has necessitated an active role by both the college and the project co-ordinators in the field of market research.*

The college — in close consultation with MSC — is in the process of establishing a data base of employer information in the area. The data base will use the Norsk Data System, the college having obtained a grant of £1500 towards the cost of additional equipment from the Department of Industry. The necessary research with employers has already begun. It builds on information collected by Boston Training Association and individual programmes with varying degrees of success. This will involve the use of an extensive network of staff within the college and at Boston Training Association, the vast majority of information being gathered, at least initially, through face-to-face contacts with employers. This research follows up on Boston Training Association's Local Collaborative Project into the needs of industry in South Lincolnshire, relating the data gathered to planned product development. Inevitably, from work already carried out, this will lead to an expansion in specialist self-supporting courses for industry. An example is that one very specific course requested by a major Boston company was developed and delivered within three weeks of that demand being expressed. As a result of the success of this course, a number of further courses have been developed for this particular company.

John Bates and David Smale
Lincolnshire Project Co-ordinators

*The most potentially spectacular of the market research activity is however likely to emerge in Birmingham. The city is attempting to move towards a highly centralised management approach in which training is a major strand, and in which the city's nine colleges link closely with its other agencies and with one another.*

Birmingham, in common with many other large cities in the UK, has severe economic problems and resulting social difficulties. In an effort to alleviate these and assist in the regeneration of the local economy the city council has established an Economic Development Unit (EDU.)

In EDU policy, training is highlighted as a key issue, and founded on a conviction that the progression of a training strategy for city companies and residents' needs should be carried through as an integral part of the economic strategy for Birmingham. A team of training consultants has been appointed to the EDU to develop and implement the city's training strategy. Their work involves liaison with the business community and voluntary sector to identify market trends, specific training needs and areas of skill shortages. Training is arranged with the city's colleges, the polytechnic or a private provider and funded by the city and the European Social Fund.

Alongside these developments the city's Continuing Education Division (CED) has established a Central Marketing and Development Team. Their role is to assist the city's nine colleges in planning, developing, promoting and delivering the education and training identified for local employers and the community at large. During its first 12 months of operation the team has concentrated on developing new organisational structures, with colleges working together in consortia to meet the needs of a particular employment sector. In addition a number of working partnerships has been created with leading local employers. In one case a specialist CAD/CAM training facility has been established on employer's premises.

The next stage in the development process is to integrate further the intrinsic resources of the EDU and CED into a corporate whole — 'the responsive authority', EDU undertaking promotion, labour market intelligence and training needs work, and CEO concentrating on efficient and effective delivery through employment sector consortia. This is not the traditional approach of autonomy and isolation at all levels — LEA, college, department and lecturer.

In order to develop provision which will satisfy the training needs of employers, a more business like approach must be introduced. We in the education and training business are competing against a growing number of private providers, many of whom offer a first class service.

Initial contact with external organisations and statutory bodies is generally through CED's Marketing and Development Team. This approach maintains coherence and co-ordination and assists in avoiding duplication and competition between colleges. By utilising appropriate extrinsic resources towards realising city objectives, significant savings can be made in terms of development costs and time. Moreover, the bringing together of partners builds a larger corporate whole working towards the regeneration of the local economy.

It is against this background that the Birmingham Responsive College Project has been established to carry out research into key issues and problems (called assignments) identified by the EDU/CED Project Management Committee and the project co-ordinators. The project has been integrated into the EDU and CED, giving it access to a wide range of expertise and resources to assist in its work.

Four vocational areas have been selected as a focus for the project's research and development work: tourism, construction, business development and new technology applied to manufacturing - all of which are included within the first phase of the city's training strategy. There is evidence through EDU surveys that all four areas have major training needs and also offer many new employment opportunities.

Robert Bilbrough
Birmingham Project Co-ordinator

*It needs to be noted, however, that merely knocking on employers' doors with a questionnaire or interview schedule does not constitute the totality of market research. In the Product Cycle, quality control activities related to students currently in employment are likely to reveal to the perspicacious enquirer considerable insight into both current and projected developments, as is the whole spectrum of after-sales enquiry. Market research is not a once and for all activity; it needs to be ongoing in order to reflect changing and evolving needs and sudden shifts in supply and demand which afflict the business world.*

## PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT, SELLING AND PROMOTING

*The development of training products (courses, programmes) has not been a personal concern for project co-ordinators. Like all the rest of us, they are constrained by their own disciplines and lack specialist curriculum knowledge in many of the sectors in which they are undertaking the introduction of a marketing approach. Consequently, they draw upon the expertise of individuals within colleges by handing over to them requests for new or modified courses.*

*On the selling and promoting side, college activity has been variable in our*

*participating project colleges. However, there is surprisingly little detailed information currently available about how best to contact potential clients. A number of important questions have yet to be confronted systematically by our projects: how do students learn about courses? Are different student groups (market segments) most appropriately reached through particular information venues? If so, are those venues a function of student age, social group origin, geographical locality, or subject area, or some combination of the fore-going? The whole business of contacting potential clients is complex and in need of organised enquiry. The Bedfordshire project has undertaken exploratory work in this field.*

Students and employers experience difficulty in:

1 gaining access to appropriate information;

2 understanding course information.

Students indicate that they obtain information from a variety of sources. The source of information is determined by the type and level of course applied for. BTEC National applicants, for example, are much more likely to seek advice from the school careers teachers than those applying for City & Guilds craft courses. All too often the students believe the information supplied by these sources is inaccurate.

Understanding course information proves difficult because of education jargon. Phrases such as 'the core modules will include communications and organisation in its environment in the first year', which appears in one college prospectus, is typical of the jargon which is meaningless to many students.

Employers experience little difficulty in understanding information but believe it to be generally incomplete. They are interested in cost and duration of courses, modes of attendance, course content and progression opportunities. There are as yet no examples in the sectors examined by the co-ordinators of course leaflets which meet all of these employers' information needs.

The co-ordinators have met college staff individually and collectively to discuss the findings. Tentative causes for difficulties experienced have been identified and action to remedy the situation has been formulated as follows:

1 The network for distributing course publicity is largely uncoordinated. In some instances departments operate individual distribution systems which create duplication of effort and resources.

Bedford College has responded to the problem by developing an electronic mailing system to assist in information distribution. A new marketing co-ordinator has been appointed who will, in addition to other duties, co-ordinate publicity design and distribution centrally. Other colleges have responded in different ways and the lessons learned will be disseminated across the institutions.

2 Often no distinction is made between different client groups. Students, whether youth or adult, local or overseas, receive information of a general nature in the form of a prospectus. Similarly, employers, whatever the size of the organisation, receive the same prospectus. Research has clearly shown that the information needs of all these groups are different.

The colleges have in many instances recognised this problem in advance of project activity, but even where publicity material has recently been rewritten client input has often been limited.

An excellent example of a course leaflet, which has been designed by current BTEC National students for future clients, is in evidence at Barnfield College. The course leaflet precisely anticipates the co-ordinators' recommendations since it contains all the elements students have identified as important in the survey. Progression routes, details of employment opportunities and course content all feature in the course leaflet, which has been forwarded to FESC for use within other projects and has been used as an example of good practice in other Bedfordshire Colleges. It is interesting that the use of this leaflet, combined with increased personal contact with schools in the area, has created a 100 per cent increase in applications for the BTEC National course at Barnfield for 1986/87.

F Donohue
Bedfordshire Project Co-ordinator

*Of course, in this world of the professional educationalist, selling and promoting have to involve something beyond getting bottoms on seats. Our marketing approach is about meeting client needs. Again, preliminary work suggests weaknesses in the bringing together of student and course/programme. If colleges tend to be good with reference to personal crisis counselling, they are perhaps less good (and teachers still less often available out of term times) at course counselling. We are very interested to know whether students are able to explore a number of course offerings before making choices; whether unfortunate choices permit transfer to more appropriate offerings; and whether there is genuine induction of new recruits. The Bedfordshire team has been exploring this area as well.*

Students experience difficulty in:

1 making an informed career choice;

2 relating to the college as an organisation.

Tentative causes for difficulties experienced have been identified. Action to remedy the situation has been agreed as follows:

1 There has not been a co-ordinated advisory service in colleges. Research carried out by the FEU in the Experimental College Project (RP 195) suggests that the absence of such a service contributes to the problems which students in our survey have identified. The colleges have responded positively to this information.

Bedford College, for example, has created a course enquiry service which is open throughout the summer. Its School of Business Studies enrolled as many students as possible before September 1986 in order to release staff to advise and counsel applicants at the main enrolment stage. Staff released from normal administrative duties have benefited from a short in-house development programme designed to improve counselling skills. A distinction between the administrative and advisory nature of enrolment is emerging and should benefit applicants considerably.

2 In many instances there has been no planned induction for new entrants. Now, Barnfield and Bedford Colleges, in particular,

have agreed to experiment with different approaches to induction during 1986/87. There is evidence that effective induction programmes have been developed for some YTS entrants, and it may be possible to build on this experience to develop an improved service for the wider range of clients.

These experiments and others taking place across the county will be evaluated. The staff development and resourcing implications are being monitored and will form part of the agenda for later discussions with college management.

*In September 1986, the Bedfordshire, Lincolnshire and Sheffield teams spent some time in monitoring course enrolment in project colleges with a view to identifying possible improvements and modifications to the same process in 1987. At the time of writing, the results of these surveys are not yet available.*

## QUALITY CONTROL

*Thus far, quality control has been the most fully developed of the product cycle activities. To a large extent this has been the result of the starting date (January, February) of three of our first four projects, when students are firmly embedded in the traditional college course. Considerable work has been done in all of the projects in this area, but the most fully explored of the project colleges has been the Boston (Lincolnshire) institution, where the availability of two project co-ordinators to work in a single medium size (Group V) college has permitted the fullest, in-depth analysis. Because it is focused on a single institution, the Boston story gives perhaps the most accessible introduction for the reader to programme work in this area.*

Work to date has largely centred on the establishment, use and development of instruments and mechanisms of quality control within Boston College of Further Education, especially measures of student retention, absence and satisfaction. These have been obtained from the use of one questionnaire, the survey of students at the college being conducted during March and April by ourselves. It is our view that the quality of course provision may best be obtained by the use and refinement of a variety of measures of satisfaction directed at students, sponsoring employers and points of destination of students after completion of full time courses. In the case of both students and sponsoring employers it is desirable that their views of the

quality of courses and ancillary activity are obtained on a number of occasions, a feedback at any one time may well prove misleading. Clearly there are practical constraints involved, particularly with students after the completion of courses, and also in terms of sponsoring employers.

The number of students surveyed represented all students within Boston College of Further Education on WRNAFE courses, with the exception of some CITB courses on block provision, as set out in Table 1 below.

Table 1

**SURVEY OF STUDENTS ON WRNAFE COURSES AT BOSTON COLLEGE OF FURTHER EDUCATION**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Number of students on registers | 1324 | |
| Number of students who had 'dropped out' | 157 | 12% |
| Number of students absent | 222 | 17% |
| Number of students who filled in questionnaire | 945 | 71% |

Of all students currently registered and covered by the survey 81 per cent filled in a questionnaire. Such a comprehensive survey has enabled the team to make adjustments to the manner in which we will measure the quality of provision in the future, but also to modify that provision in the light of information obtained and subsequent discussions with programme directors and within the management group of the college. The latter was assisted by the means by which the data was collected and presented, aggregated in programmes from individual courses and made available in the form of a general report for the college. The breakdown for each individual programme within the general report is set out in Table 2.

Table 2

**BREAKDOWN BY PROGRAMMES OF SURVEY OF STUDENTS ON WRNAFE COURSES AT BOSTON COLLEGE OF FURTHER EDUCATION**

| Programme | Number of students on register | Number of students who had 'dropped out' | | Number of students absent | | Students questionnaired | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Business Studies | 212 | 45 | 22% | 20 | 10% | 147 | 70% |
| Catering | 122 | 6 | 5% | 19 | 16% | 97 | 80% |
| Construction | 175 | 9 | 6% | 20 | 12% | 146 | 84% |
| Fashion | 66 | 9 | 14% | 11 | 17% | 46 | 71% |
| Foundation | 82[1] | 17 | 21% | 19 | 24% | 46 | 57% |
| Hairdressing | 177 | 6 | 4% | 34 | 20% | 137 | 78% |
| Secretarial | 166 | 28 | 17%[2] | 27 | 17%[3] | 111 | 67% |
| Technology | 324 | 37 | 12% | 72 | 23% | 215 | 67% |

1 YTS welding and fabrication and YTS motor vehicle bodywork included in technology programme.

2 Includes seven CPVE students who left school prior to the survey.

3 Includes five CPVE students on catering course at the time of the survey.

The information obtained from our survey was made available to each programme director in the form of a general report, a report for their particular programme, and reports for each individual course. Each programme director then discussed the reports with staff teaching on their programme before discussing them with ourselves and the acting principal of the college. The ability to look at provision at the three levels described earlier in the text proved invaluable in that it not only enabled rough preliminary comparisons from one course to another but also across programmes. As an interesting piece of information the over-all figure for the number of students who had 'dropped out' of business studies courses was distorted by the fact that 85 per cent of them were from a course for past YTS students, apparently due to lack of support for such training from small businesses in the area. A particularly useful piece of information concerned the differing responses of students to how well they considered they had been pre-inducted on to their courses and college life. The aggregated figure for different programmes is shown in Table 3.

Table 3

**EFFECTIVENESS OF PRE-INDUCTION FOR STUDENTS ON WRNAFE COURSES AT BOSTON COLLEGE OF FURTHER EDUCATION**

How well prepared were you for starting your course and college life?

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Prepared | 747 | 80% |
| Unprepared | 198 | 21% |

In this instance it was useful to look at student response in terms of induction policy across programmes, particularly in contrasting high and low levels of satisfaction. This has assisted the process of identifying and using good practice within the college.

The consequence has been that a number of programmes are now in the process of modifying both their pre-induction and induction policies.

Considerable differences were recorded in student satisfaction levels, not only from one programme to another but also among courses, some of which were parallel. The over-all figures for student satisfaction with courses are expressed in Table 4.

Table 4

**STUDENT SATISFACTION WITH WRNAFE COURSES AT BOSTON COLLEGE OF FURTHER EDUCATION**

How satisfied are you with your course?

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Very satisfied | 116 | 12% | 80% |
| Satisfied | 640 | 67% | |
| Dissatisfied | 180 | 19% | 20% |
| Very dissatisfied | 9 | 1% | |

With a supplementary question which asked students to explain fully the reasons for expressed level of satisfaction it became possible to identify a number of key factors in respect of the following:

1 the apparent level of organisation of the course;

2 the quality of procedures for pre-induction and induction;

3 the quality of teaching rooms and equipment;

4 staff familiarity with modern techniques in particular industries (more commonly expressed by employed students and YTS trainees);

5 the balance of work between theory and practice;

6 teaching methods (on some occasions interrelated with point 5).

It is of interest that measures of student satisfaction generally reflected measures of student retention and absence for individual courses. This has enabled us to make detailed recommendations with respect to the policies of different programmes, resource allocation and staff development. We will be looking to other sources of data before suggesting any dramatic shift of policy, though present measures of employer satisfaction seem to coincide largely with those of student satisfaction.

One of the questions in our survey was concerned with eliciting, where relevant, students' impressions of employers' support for their attending college. The figures as expressed in the general report are shown in Table 5.

Table 5

**EMPLOYERS' SUPPORT FOR STUDENT ATTENDANCE AT BOSTON COLLEGE OF FURTHER EDUCATION, AS PERCEIVED BY STUDENTS ON WRNAFE COURSES**

If relevant, what is your employer's attitude to your attending college?

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Supportive | 360 | 76% |
| Uninterested | 96 | 20% |
| Opposed | 18 | 4% |

There was a fairly even distribution of these responses from one programme to another, through it was noticeable that the more negative answers were loaded towards YTS trainees in vocational areas where these was no strong tradition of training. We shall seek to confirm or refute these findings when we progress to discussion with sponsoring employers on a significant scale in the near future.

The survey of student retention, absence and satisfaction levels must be seen only as a 'snapshot' of WRNAFE provision and as only part of the over-all picture. However, a number of changes have occurred as a result of the survey, most notably:

1 development of methods for pre-induction on the part of some programmes;

2 an increase in careers guidance and counselling for WRNAFE students;

3 changes in course content, e.g. the inclusion of an 'enterprise' element into a number of fashion courses;

4 expansion of the staff development programme;

5 enhancement of the status of the client in course provision.

## PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

In autumn 1986 a comprehensive system of quality control for WRNAFE courses at Boston College was set in place, involving the use of 12 performance indicators. The indicators to be used are set out below.

1 Student application for courses followed by non-registration: this measure will enable the college to examine in detail the extent and reasons for the loss of potential clients and will be conducted at the beginning of each relevant course. The programmes have already established a variety of means for ascertaining, to some degree, the reasons for students applying for courses but not following this through to actual registration. The particular instrument that will be used will enable us to obtain a more comprehensive picture of what happens to those

students and their reasons for non-registration in a manner that may be compared from one programme to another.

2 Student satisfaction measure to be delivered at the end of the induction programme for each course: this will seek to discover where students first obtained information about their course and the college, how successful are our different means of publicity and recruitment, and how effective particular methods of pre-induction and induction have been. We will be especially concerned to see whether students on certain programmes are better informed on course requirements, the relationship of the course to future opportunities and a greater sense of student identity with courses and the college.

3 A questionnaire to be given to students half way through the completion of their course, to examine levels of satisfaction with the course itself: this instrument has been considerably altered following our experience this year, largely in terms of simplification and the increased use of pre-coded questions.

4 At the conclusion of each course a student retention figure will be calculated to allow us to consider to what extent available resources have been under used. It is therefore a useful measure of outcomes and efficiency. As part of this process we will concern ourselves with looking at patterns that may emerge across college and over a period of time, seeking to discover reasons for differences in student retention rates between courses and programmes.

5 Following from instrument 4 above, a survey will be conducted of those students who have failed to complete their college course ('dropouts'), with the objective of enquiring why they left, and, where necessary, modifying or changing factors which have caused disaffection.

6 A measure of student absenteeism (expressed as actual total class attendance as a percentage of possible class attendance): the actual and possible class attendance would account for those students who have left their course to avoid distortion of this measure. This is a further measure of efficiency, comple-

mentary to that of student retention, in that students may wish to express dis-affection with course provision through absence rather than leaving the course. This may be true of YTS trainees and students sponsored by employers.

7 Further measures will be made of student satisfaction after examination results and annually for three years thereafter, based on a random stratified sample. We will be especially interested in changes of perception on the part of students of courses in the light of past course experience.

8 Pass rates in examinations where appropriate.

9 The percentage of students on full time courses securing full time employment/places in higher education.

10 Destination satisfaction measures on the part of employers/places of high education, in the case of full time students.

11 Satisfaction measures expressed by sponsoring employers and YTS agencies for students on part time courses.

12 Time lapse between locally identified shortfall of skilled labour and training response, given market research conducted by the college, MSC, and other agencies.

A number of further comments are necessary with regard to the use of these performance indicators. Instruments 1-7 will be conducted by each programme as part of the review of quality on each of their courses, and monitored in this first year of use by ourselves. Instruments 8-10 will be the responsibility of the Vocational Guidance Tutor within the college, while 11-12 will fall within the brief of the recently established Industrial Support Unit.

The questionnaires to be used are brief, simple to conduct and relatively easy to analyse. They are largely based on pre-coded answers; a computer programme has recently been devised which will greatly assist the process of analysis. This has been developed by the Head of the Computer Section at the college, is based on the Norsk Data system, and has the advantage of being extremely flexible in terms of accepting considerable changes in

questionnaire design. The greatest demand on time will be inputting the information from the above measures of performance, which in the first instance will be carried out by the secretary to the Responsive College Project. In the long term we would envisage this being done by the secretary to the Industrial Support Unit.

This range of measures of performance will enable us over a period of time to develop a detailed impression of course quality. This information will be central to discussions between programme directors and staff teaching on their programmes, and the senior management of the college and programme directors, concerning the quality of provision and desirable course development. This will involve detailed discussion about the measures themselves, the information obtained from their use, market research of employer training needs in the area, the effectiveness of marketing by the college, resource allocation and staff development.

John Bates and David Smale
Lincolnshire Project Co-ordinators

## AFTER-SALES SERVICE

*As noted above, this phase of the Product Cycle constitutes a form of market research since it involves following up ex-students to learn how effective their training has proved to be in the workplace. When visits to ex-students are combined with discussions with other members of the firm, there exists a relatively cost-effective possibility of obtaining considerable information of use to course planners, as well as an opportunity to identify as yet unmet training needs and to sell additional college facilities.*

*Among the first four projects, Sheffield is perhaps most comparable to Birmingham, a multi-college (five) project in a city LEA. At present, however, the commitment to a unified, cross-college provision is less fully developed, although there are current explorations into the possibility of a city marketing policy. The Sheffield team has been undertaking some interesting preliminary work in the area of employer surveys in both private and public sector provision.*

The Sheffield project team was of the opinion that the employer's views were founded upon three factors:

1 his own view, probably based on limited first-hand experience of the colleges and influenced by the opinions of others, whether his own workforce or reports in journals and the press;

2 the attitude towards further education of his employees, their information as to the usefulness of the course of study they had completed, its relevance to the job within the company and possibly the improved opportunities in respect of the type of job and the promotion prospects which resulted;

3 the views of the immediate superior of the employee who had attended college. It seems sensible to talk to the employee's supervisor for he would be the one person who would know with certainty whether the employee had become more useful to the company as a result of the course of study he had undertaken.

The project team decided the best approach would be to prepare an interview schedule to be used in a face-to-face interview with the employer and to prepare questionnaires for employees who had recently completed a course of study, and also for their immediate supervisors.

The interview schedule was designed first of all to establish the extent to which the employer had contact with the local colleges. We were interested in the frequency with which the company was visited by college staff and to what extent the college had encouraged employers to visit the college to look at the facilities available there and to play an integral part in the planning and support of the college courses.

The questions then turned to the training policy of the company. Did the company have a training department? Were they members of a training association? Would they automatically consider contacting the colleges when a training need arose?

The interview schedule went on to investigate the barriers which confronted the employer when considering the college to meet his training needs. Were the courses offered of the right length? Were the facilities in the college adequate? Were the staff 'in tune' with the modern demands of industry? Were the courses offered at the right time and the right place, and were they value for money?

Finally, the questions led to a short discussion of the employer's immediate training needs. If immediate training needs are identified, this gives a good opportunity for the colleges to prove themselves.

After the interviewer has completed an interview schedule he or she then seeks to establish whether there are employees who have recently completed a course at a college and asks to interview both the employee and the supervisor. The questionnaire used for the employee is very similar to the one used with students who are attending the college course. However, by using the questionnaire six months after completion of the course, we are able to identify whether his or her view of the course has changed since its completion. The questionnaire used with the employee's supervisor seeks to establish whether the employee is more knowledgeable, skilful and useful to the company. It also seeks to find out whether the attitude of the employee has improved in respect of the company.

These three instruments are proving very effective. Although to date only a relatively small number of companies has been visited, much useful information has already been obtained. The Sheffield project team was asked to look in depth at three sector areas: caring, computing and engineering. Following up the employers in the caring areas is relatively easy because this work is mainly in the public service sector.

The project team decided to concentrate on visiting engineering firms because, in so doing, they would be able to cover both engineering and computing. However, it is planned at a later stage in the project to visit a number of computer specialists.

It is important when visiting companies to obtain access at the right level, firstly to obtain credibility with the company's staff and, secondly, to ensure that the employer's representative is aware of developments within the structure of the company.

The method used to obtain access to the companies was by contacting the Engineering Employers Association. After discussions with their local director, the association selected a number of companies for the project team to visit. The companies were selected to represent varied sizes:

— 10 with less than 25 employees;

— 10 with 25-100 employees;

— 20 with 10-400 employees;

— 10 with more than 400 employees.

The project team was very grateful for the assistance given by the Engineering Employers Association and their director who wrote personally to each company asking them to give the project team their full co-operation. When the 50 companies have been visited it is planned to write a report highlighting the main findings. However, even at this early stage, some interesting comments have been made and trends identified.

A number of familiar common themes are reappearing. These are embodied in the following statements:

(a) Very little training is taking place due to the fact that there is a ready trained workforce within the ranks of the unemployed.

(b) Few companies appear to be taking apprentices. Most young people seem to find YTS places. Many companies no longer have a structure based on traditional apprenticeship, but rely on YTS.

(c) Many companies are still cutting back on their workforces.

(d) There is a lack of planning for the future in training by many companies. Only short-term needs seem to get attention.

(e) Where education and training are required it is generally short-term and job specific.

(f) Companies appear to be controlled by accountants. This results in a decrease in training budgets.

The feedback received by the project team from employers has highlighted a number of problems, including the following:

(a) Colleges do not have a central point of access where information is available about all the courses offered.

(b) There appears to be no consistent pricing policy across the city. Colleges are therefore unable to respond swiftly to enquiries

quoting specific prices for courses. There is also a lack of flexibility.

(c) Colleges have not succeeded in getting course information to employers at the right time and place.

(d) Colleges are not geared up to handle enquiries and negotiate new courses between July and September.

(e) College staff generally do not know how to respond to clients in a positive way and are poor at selling the service.

Norman Crowson
Sheffield Project Co-ordinator

## THE PUBLIC SECTOR — EMPLOYER CONTACT

The public sector has a very strong impact on employment in Sheffield. Of the five largest employers only one (BSC/United Engineering Steels plc) is in the private sector and the leading employer in terms of numbers employed is Sheffield City Council with over 26,000 on the payroll (Source: Department of Employment and Economic Development Survey, 1986).

As the Sheffield project has focused on certain sector areas, employer contact has followed a similar pattern, with most effort concentrating on (a) business/secretarial/clerical, and (b) caring.

Meetings were organised both with groups of employer representatives and with individuals, with activities taking place on college as well as employers' premises. Visits to employers' premises were preferred as they gave a much richer picture of what was going on. They presented opportunities to identify new training needs and to undertake informal after-sales surveys, but were costly in terms of time spent.

The instruments used to gather information were those devised for private sector use but with slight modification. The process of information gathering turned out to be easier in the public sector than with private sector employers, particularly when compared with small businesses. There were a number of reasons for this which are discussed below.

Those interviewed on a one-to-one basis could be divided into two categories. First there were personnel/training professionals, such as the Training Officer for Family and Community Services Department. They were characterised by a clear understanding of the local further education system and were accustomed to rehearsing their views on vocational education and training. With very little prompting such interviewees were able to outline the strengths and weaknesses of colleges and courses.

They were also willing to identify specific problems and offer solutions. For example, one training officer said they had experienced problems with a course but felt that nobody in the college was taking the matter seriously, and yet to refer the matter to the Chief Education Officer would not help long-term relationships. The difficulty was eventually resolved but the training officer went on to identify the general issue, that if a client has a complaint and the college does not respond, there are at present no channels for resolving it. The Responsive College Project, it was suggested, should take on this role.

The second category interviewed could be roughly described as supervisory or middle management, such as residential social workers or office services supervisors. Most appeared well qualified in their field and a substantial number said they had attended the local colleges. They were characterised by a keen understanding of the needs of both their organisation and the student and were able to articulate them. This presented a contrast with some of the smaller industrial concerns where it was often quite difficult to elicit an opinion.

A remand home social worker spoke of his assistant who was doing a day-release course in social care. 'I don't mind if time is spent on care of the elderly and things not specifically relevant to the job — he may want to transfer to another area later. We see this course as giving a broad base, building the students' confidence and preparing them for the more demanding courses later on.' 'We have difficulty covering for colleagues who are away at college but we put up with it. The remand home needs professionals who think in terms of a career and not just a job and training has an important role here.'

Meetings were also arranged with groups of employer representatives, often with common characteristics such as the large employers' secretarial training workshop organised at one of the colleges with similar numbers of lecturers and employers working together. In some ways these were more

fruitful than the one-to-one interviews in that one employer sparks ideas off another.

One of the main problems has been the shortage of lecturers with good customer liaison skills. Many members of staff, even at a senior level, found it difficult to identify their college's strengths and would talk in negative terms about staffing problems or timetabling difficulties, which employers found irritating. It was unusual for staff to describe a course in terms of its benefits and thus capture the employer's imagination. More common was the reiteration of course detail, often in a rather obscure form. The public sector employers, on the whole, appeared more tolerant of this production orientation than did the private sector employers, but nevertheless it is an issue which has to be addressed.

## PUBLIC SECTOR EMPLOYER PERCEPTIONS

The project was set up in 1986, so the number of employers contacted has necessarily been small. However, as the project co-ordinators had had contact with local employers for a number of years before this, it has been possible to make some useful generalisations.

Public sector perceptions of the colleges were quite favourable. There appeared to be a number of reasons for this; these will be explored below.

The simple answer is that the colleges are offering clients what they need and want. This is certainly the case in some instances, but other factors appeared to contribute to their satisfaction. Employers, such as the Manpower Services Commission, the local authority, Family and Community Services Department and Sheffield University, had structures and procedures set up to communicate with the colleges. Contact was said to be regular and relationships built up between individuals over the years. Bureaucratic training structures did not necessarily inhibit communication. Typically, one supervisor said, 'I don't need to contact our training department. If I've a query I just give the course tutor a ring'.

In a closely knit community like Sheffield there has always been a strong 'old boy' network linking colleges with employers. In industry this has been weakened as manufacturing has declined and the need to train has received a low priority. These traditional networks still exist between FE and the public sector presenting opportunities for improving client

satisfaction, but also, unfortunately, with the potential to reinforce complacency and inhibit change.

Shared attitudes and a common culture have given colleges and the public sector a sound basis for communication and appear to reinforce client satisfaction. The employers tended to place a high value on education and training 'as that is how you move up the hierarchy'. Whereas manufacturing industry was complaining that 'FE doesn't speak our language', employers such as the local authority or the Regional Health Authority were much more likely to see eye to eye with educators. A local authority training officer summed this up by saying, 'There are many avenues (for communication). We feel we can actually influence colleges. Liaison gets better each year'.

Employers displayed an understanding of the difficulties of making the education service more responsive and flexible and people were willing to work with lecturers to overcome them. College staff were described as 'easy to get on with', 'helpful and friendly'. Public sector employers appeared to be more tolerant of some of the communication problems which characterise FE. 'We sometimes have difficulties getting hold of people in the vacation but we work round it,' was a commonly expressed view.

It would, however, be inaccurate to say that there were no areas of dissatisfaction. Public sector employers, it appeared, were either more tolerant (due to a shared culture or friendly relationships with colleges), or they had channels through which they could express dissatisfaction and bring about change. They were much less likely than industry to speak of using private training organisations.

One common complaint was about location of colleges and the condition of buildings. Students did not like long journeys and drab or draughty class rooms. Unlike many employed in small companies, the public sector employees interviewed enjoyed modern and comfortable surroundings. While it was understood that during a period of economic restraint college buildings could not be upgraded, something should be done to make the older college buildings more cheerful.

Some dissatisfaction was also expressed about course organisation, particularly problems with room changes. While it was understood that space was at a premium, employees attending on one day a week like to

know where they are to be located. Lecturers failing to hand back work on time was also a source of dissatisfaction.

A number of employer representatives mentioned the need for staff to return to the workplace to retrain. One social worker expressed very strong views about the desirability of lecturers returning to the workplace. He felt it important they should pass on skills as well as knowledge yet, he suggested, 'many have lost the skill to pass on skill'. He thought it would be useful for lecturers and social workers to exchange jobs for a minimum of two years. Another social worker believed more practitioners could be drawn in by the colleges to work with lecturers and supplement theory with a blow-by-blow account of what actually happens at work.

It was suggested by a number of interviewees that there had been changes in the working environment which called for new types of skill and knowledge. It was thought that colleges did not place enough emphasis on such areas as copyright law, the Data Protection Act and sexual/racial equality, on which the larger and particularly the public employers placed a high value. There was also a perceived need for improved supervisory skills, as even quite junior members of staff were called on to supervise trainees.

M Chapman
Sheffield Project Co-ordinator

*Interesting though the above may be, it represents only an initial attempt at exploring after-sales activity. The project teams will have to confront a number of difficult questions: what level of after-sales follow-up is possible/acceptable? how can it be resourced? how can it be organised within colleges? There is much which remains to be done.*

*While the Product Cycle constitutes a management information system, it must be stressed that it is not an end in itself — knowledge for its own sake. Unless the information is used to inform and facilitate action, it is a waste of time. Where problems are identified, they need to be confronted and resolved or at least alleviated, all of which implies support activity within the college/LEA. In particular, it means a programme of staff development founded not solely on provider career aspirations and personal interests, but which takes as its starting point client needs and perceived deficiencies*

*in meeting those needs. The Bedfordshire project has begun a careful scrutiny of industrial secondments with a view to determining broad guidelines as to the suitability of various forms of staff development activity and the useful ways of organising such activity.*

A great deal of staff training and retraining covering a wide range of management and curriculum issues has taken place within Bedfordshire colleges. Funding through a range of DES and MSC initiatives in areas such as PICKUP, TRIST, CPVE and YTS has enabled colleges to improve their staff development programmes significantly. Project research suggests, however, that in selecting staff to attend courses and even in choosing particular courses, colleges often make little or no reference to institutional or community needs. The staff development policy is therefore often ad hoc, reflecting a reactive rather than a proactive approach to opportunities arising. The NAFE development plan aims to overcome this problem by requiring institutions to produce a corporate staff development plan reflecting individual, community, industrial and institutional needs. The co-ordinators welcome this approach and are supporting it by promoting effective staff development activity. They have promoted staff development events in the area of market research and quality control. The most successful development to date has been in the provision of short industrial secondments.

Discussions with other project co-ordinators, particularly with the Birmingham Project, have identified industrial secondments as a most successful way to increase awareness of and response to client need. In common with the other projects Bedfordshire has evidence that the zeal of the returning secondees was not always used to best advantage within the organisation. In order to improve the situation the project team has devised post-secondment guidelines which seek to maximise the impact of the secondment on the individual and on the institution. The LEA has supported efforts in this direction by making increased use of the DES in-service training budget to finance 1800 hours of staff training during May — August 1986. Forty members of college staff have, as a result, been allocated between 30 and 60 hours to work in various ways with local industry. Twenty per cent of those participating have not taken part in staff development programmes in recent years.

The co-ordinators have requested staff participating to produce clear aims and objectives in advance of their activities. The post-secondment guidelines have also requested staff to:

1 evaluate the secondment in terms of personal, curriculum and institutional developments;

2 outline methods by which they intend to disseminate the findings to members of their own or other institutions.

These guidelines should help overcome problems identified by staff who have benefited from secondment in the past. These staff have indicated a sense of frustration caused by the inability to communicate their findings in a suitable forum.

Early indications from staff participating in the 1800 hour training programme suggest that the development will enhance responsiveness to client need. Reports from the first participants include:

1 A suggestion that staff visiting employer's premises should agree objectives in advance of the visit which reflect, where possible, corporate policy. This suggestion has been made by staff who attended a one-week marketing course. The course provided for an immediate 20-hour follow-up of marketing activity with local firms. By putting into practice the lessons learned, participants believe they have demonstrated greater confidence in their product range and a more professional approach to the task. The group suggested that other staff would benefit from a similar training programme.

2 A need to develop a new course for legal personnel working in Bedford has been identified. In addition to indentifying a gap in progression opportunities for legal executives, new opportunities for updating skills of legal technicians have been discovered.

3 All secondees have indicated that first hand experience and observation of the industrial/commercial working environment will assist in the development of teaching materials and contribute to improved learning opportunities for students. An increase of use of work-based projects has been identified by several secondees as a way of increasing relevance to the workplace within their teaching.

*Bedfordshire is clearly moving towards a county approach to staff*

development. By way of contrast, the Lincolnshire (Boston College) project has, of necessity, had to look towards an institutional solution.

The whole policy of introducing an effective system of quality control into the college is closely associated with the meaningful expansion of the staff development programme. In the first instance this has involved a comprehensive audit of staff expertise within the college and very close liaison with the staff development officer. This close co-operation has already yielded a number of positive results, either with policy implications or specific development activities:

1 a TRIST programme to enhance links between the college and schools and industry in the area, allowing one tutor from each programme to be released for one day per week initially until Christmas 1986; feedback from tutors undertaking this will be through programmes and the Industrial Support Unit;

2 a critical examination of how best to develop the use of industrial secondments for staff;

3 commencement of an audit of expertise within the community which will help the process of releasing staff from teaching for staff training programmes and to develop new areas of work;

4 an audit of training provision in the area to consider the desirability in specific instances of joint provision of courses;

5 the provision of lunch time courses for staff who wish to attend on the basis of a number of 'open window' sessions on topics such as Restart, Open Learning, GCSE, etc;

6 the examination of different methods of pre-induction and induction of students;

7 the involvement of the careers service for half a day every fortnight to increase, under the direction of the vocational guidance tutor, input of careers guidance and counselling for WRNAFE students;

John Bates and David Smale
Lincolnshire Project Co-ordinators

*In selecting the above material, I have, of course been concerned primarily to illustrate the range and variety of Product Cycle activity occurring across the national programme. Within any one project, one can find examples of all of the cycle phases. Additionally, since the co-ordinators contributed the above, each of the projects has moved on substantially. What has thus far characterised the RCP has been the speed of developmental activity at local level against a growing background of teacher support and enthusiasm. Nonetheless, despite intimations of at least partial early successes, we are all aware of how much remains to be done and of the urgency of those needs.*

Ernest Theodossin
Deputy Director, Responsive College Programme

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# Further Education Staff College Publications

**The Further Education Staff College** was established in 1960 with the principal objective of improving the efficiency of further education establishments. Since 1963 the college has organised study conferences at which senior personnel in education, industry and government discuss and analyse developments in further education, and make recommendations for action and enquiry.

It soon became apparent that Coombe Lodge would not be able to accommodate all those who wished to take part in its conferences, so it was decided to publish a series of reports which would help to disseminate the work of the staff college to those working in further and higher education. What began as reports on selected study conferences has developed into a series of publications on subjects of general interest to the FE service.

As well as an annual volume of Coombe Lodge Reports, the college publishes books on Management in Colleges and Studies in Further Education. Write to **Publications, Further Education Staff College, Blagdon, Bristol BS18 6RG,** or telephone **Blagdon (0761) 62503**, for a full list of publications. Reports are available by annual subscription or single titles may be purchased. Prices of reports are as follows:

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